

## LEADING ARTICLE

# Vascular Surgery in Modern Greece

P. Balas

*First Surgical Clinic, Faculty of Medicine, University of Athens, Athens, Greece*

Following the glorious Hellenistic and Byzantine periods, the Turkish occupation of Greece lasted four centuries. During this period the Greek people of the mainland missed the opportunity to participate in or benefit from the renaissance of art and sciences including medicine in Europe. Nevertheless the educated Greek refugees who had escaped from occupied Greece to Florence contributed to this renaissance. Modern Greece has been a free country for about 165 years.

The first well known Greek surgeon who made an international contribution to the field of lymphoedema was E. Kondoleon (1912)<sup>1</sup> who performed the homonymous operation for lymphoedema of the extremities which remained popular for many decades. Professor N. Christeas, the author's mentor studied in the school of R. Lériché in Strasbourg (1937-1938) together with M. E. DeBakey, J. Dos Santos, J. Kunlin and R. Fontaine and before the second world war he introduced the philosophy and experiences of the school of Lériché to Greece. He treated arterial occlusive diseases conservatively by blocking the stellate and the lumbar sympathetic ganglia, infiltrating them with novocaine solution. He also performed upper-thoracic and lumbar sympathectomies and peri-arterial femoral sympathectomies.

Until 1950 only a few established surgeons, namely Professor C. Tountas and the late V. Karageorgis had visited cardiovascular centres abroad mainly in the U.S.A., France, U.K. and Sweden in order to learn new vascular surgical techniques and made every effort to apply them in Greece. At that time the late N. Oeconomos was assistant to C. Dubost in his Cardiovascular Centre in Paris and had participated in the first abdominal aortic aneurysm repair

(1952).<sup>2</sup> In 1957 the author and Professor G. Skalkeas replaced the abdominal aorta in dogs with ivalon sponge. The short term results were excellent. The same surgeons performed a transabdominal embolectomy of a saddle embolus of the aortic bifurcation in 1957. The first repair of an abdominal aortic aneurysm in Greece in 1958 was by Professor C. Tountas.<sup>3</sup> One year later, in 1959, N. Oeconomos performed a retrograde embolectomy of an aortic bifurcation embolism using a special curette designed by himself and also performed the first translumbar aortogram in Greece.

The new era of vascular surgery in Greece started in the early 1960s. The author returned in 1962 from M. E. DeBakey's School in Houston, Texas, where he was the first Greek trainee in cardiovascular surgery. In the first Surgical Clinic of Athens University Medical School several vascular procedures were introduced: femoro-popliteal vein bypass in 1962, carotid endarterectomy in 1963, surgery for renovascular hypertension in 1963, aortobiliac Dacron bypass in 1963, balloon catheter embolectomy of the femoral artery in 1964 and reimplantation of a completely amputated upper extremity, the first operation of its kind in Europe, in 1967.<sup>4-6</sup> Since 1963 many surgeons have returned to Greece after training in cardiovascular and vascular surgical centres in the U.S.A., the U.K., France and later in Germany. Vascular surgery was started in university hospitals, state hospitals and private clinics alike. The Greek pioneer vascular surgeons with formal training were Professors D. Lazaridis, G. Poulias,<sup>7</sup> M. Sechas, V. Dalainas<sup>8</sup> and Assoc. Professor P. Dimakakos.<sup>9</sup>

In 1962 the Hellenic Vascular Surgical Society was established under the author's presidency. One of the main tasks of the Society was to organise annual

postgraduate teaching in angiology and vascular surgery. In a period of 10 years over 2000 physicians have attended and graduated from the courses after examinations and have received a diploma. The Greek vascular surgeons have been very active in organising congresses and there have been 10 important international meetings between 1963 and 1994.

In 1989 vascular surgery was recognised as a separate surgical discipline. At present, there are more than one hundred qualified Greek vascular surgeons, most of whom have received their vascular surgical training abroad. At present there are 10 vascular surgical clinics, five of which are university hospitals and five are state clinics. The most important aspect of the organisation of vascular surgical clinics and the establishment of training in vascular surgery in Greece is that it is still improving. A large part of the Greek population is now receiving good vascular surgical and angiological treatment.

## References

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